

Labor Day in Bungalowville by Charles Wysocki (1929–2002)

Think about all of the different types of communities, small and large, that exist in the world. Communities can consist of people linked together by many different things. **A community may be made up of people with common interests or hobbies.** Or a community may simply be a group of people that live in the same area. **A group of people who actively cooperate with one another is also considered a community.** A group of people who **share the same religious beliefs is a community, too.** Though their members may be scattered throughout the world, they are united by their beliefs. **The word *community* can also be used to describe a group of people who share similar economic or political backgrounds.** People with a common profession also can form a community; for example, doctors make up the medical community.

“There are no strangers in this world,
only friends we haven't met yet.”
(Anonymous)

Activity Right now you belong to several communities. Below, list the communities that you are a part of—those of which you are a member by choice and those to which you belong by circumstance. Then, consider why each of these communities is important to you. How does each community influence your life, and how do you affect each community?

BELIEVING...



The Church begins and grows.

Imagine that you were living in Jerusalem around the year 30—the year of Jesus' death. From a political point of view you were living in the Roman Empire, a vast grouping of territories controlled and governed by Roman rule. And ultimately the Roman emperor had the highest authority. But you were also part of the first Christian community. What might you have experienced at that time? Perhaps you saw and heard Jesus teach. Perhaps you witnessed the horrors of his suffering and death and then rejoiced at the news of his Resurrection from the dead and Ascension into heaven. Perhaps, too, you were present on the morning of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit descended on the community of Jesus' disciples.

On that morning, Peter and the other disciples were gathered together in a house in Jerusalem. Suddenly, "there came from the sky a noise like a strong driving wind, and it filled the entire house in which they were. Then there appeared to them tongues as of fire, which parted and came to rest on

each one of them" (Acts of the Apostles 2:2–3). At that moment the disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit. They were strengthened to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ to the world. It was then that "the Church was openly displayed to the crowds and the spread of the Gospel among the nations, through preaching, was begun" (CCC, 767).

Peter told the people of Jerusalem, "Let the whole house of Israel know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified" (Acts of the Apostles 2:36). When people in the crowd asked, "What are we to do?" Peter answered, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the holy Spirit" (Acts of the Apostles 2:37, 38). Amazingly, as we can read in the Acts of the Apostles, about three thousand people were baptized that very day. All those who were baptized received the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit was with the members of the first Christian community, guiding them to believe in Jesus and helping them to remember and live out Jesus' teachings. And the members of this first Christian community, the early Church, "devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers. . . . All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their property and possessions and divide them among all according to each one's need. Every day they devoted themselves to meeting together in the temple area and to breaking bread in their homes" (Acts of the Apostles 2:42, 44–46).

With the help and guidance of the Holy Spirit, the community of Jesus' disciples had become something that we can recognize today, over two thousand years later: the Catholic Church growing and working as a community to share the good news of Jesus Christ.

Activity What are some ways that, with the help of the Holy Spirit, you proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ in the communities to which you belong?

Early Christians are martyred for their faith.

The world in which Christianity began offered some advantages to those who wanted to spread the Gospel. The Roman Empire was at peace, with networks of good roads and safe harbors. Romans spoke Latin but also favored the widely spoken Greek language. Thus, Christian missionaries who spoke Greek could preach far and wide and be understood by many. The most famous of these Christian missionaries was Paul.

After a conversion to belief in Jesus Christ, Paul spread the Gospel throughout the Roman Empire. The Lord said of Paul, "This man is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before Gentiles, kings, and Israelites" (Acts of the Apostles 9:15).

But Paul and the other early Christian missionaries faced many challenges. One was the tension that emerged with the Christians' Jewish neighbors. This tension was evidenced when the disciple Stephen was put to death in Jerusalem, falsely accused of "speaking blasphemous words against Moses and God" (Acts of the Apostles 6:11). Stephen became a martyr by witnessing to the faith and dying rather than denying his belief in Christ.

"You will receive the gift of the holy Spirit."
(Acts of the Apostles 2:38)

There was also tension with the Roman authorities. They did not require Jews within the empire to worship the Roman gods. So, at first they also ignored the early Christians who seemed to be a group within Judaism. But the Romans soon became suspicious of the Christians. And, in time, the authorities began to fear that Christianity, with its emphasis on the dignity and equality of all people in God's eyes, might also be a revolutionary political movement.

When the Christians refused to worship the Roman gods and denied that the Roman emperor was himself a god, the Romans started to persecute the Christians. The first recorded persecution of Christians began in Rome around A.D. 64, under the Emperor Nero. Other persecutions followed, and thousands of Christians accepted death rather than deny their faith. But the more the Romans persecuted the Christians, the more the number of converts to Christianity grew.

Activity Name some ways that people today are persecuted. How can our communities work together against these kinds of persecutions?

Saints Peter and Paul

Every year on June 29, the Church celebrates the feast day of Saints Peter and Paul. This feast day is noted on even the oldest existing Roman calendar, which dates back to A.D. 354.

Peter was entrusted by Jesus to lead the Apostles and to guide the growing Church. In the Acts of the Apostles we find that, when any major decisions were to be made, it was Peter to whom the other Apostles and leaders of the early Church turned. And Paul constantly journeyed to bring the good news of salvation to the world:

- On Paul's first journey he traveled to the island of Cyprus in the eastern Mediterranean, to the city of Antioch

in Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey), and to other cities in what are now Turkey and Syria.

- On his second and longest journey, he traveled to Greece, where he established a center of Christian faith in the city of Corinth.

- On his third journey he returned to Asia Minor, where he helped set up other Christian communities, including one in the city of Ephesus.

Nothing could stop Paul from preaching the Gospel. When he couldn't travel to a community to share the Christian faith, he would write a letter.

Both Peter and Paul died in Rome as martyrs. Their courage and witness are important for Catholics everywhere to honor and celebrate. Pray a prayer of thanksgiving for them.



BELIEVING...

The Church meets at the Council of Jerusalem.

When have you had to stand up for your faith?

The young Christian community, the early Church, not only faced external problems, but also faced many issues and questions from within. It was toward the end of his first missionary journey that Paul and a disciple named Barnabas visited the Christian community at Antioch. And in Antioch, in about the year 40, the word **Christian** was first used to refer to the followers of Jesus Christ. But many of these Christians were **Gentiles**, or people who, like the Romans and the Greeks, were not Jews. So, at Antioch, a controversy arose. People were asking whether Gentiles first needed to become Jews before becoming Christians. So, "it was decided that Paul, Barnabas, and some of the others should go up to Jerusalem" to ask the leaders of the Church about this question (Acts of the Apostles 15:2). In Jerusalem the Christians of Antioch were to present their dispute to the Apostles and to a new generation of leaders called **presbyters**—men whom Catholics today would call **priests**. When they reached Jerusalem, however, Paul and Barnabas discovered that the Church leaders there were struggling with the same question.

As good Jews, the earliest Christians had always respected and obeyed the **Torah**, the sacred law of faith given by God to Moses. Now people were asking whether men and women who had not been born Jews could be excused from some of the requirements of Jewish law. So, "the apostles and the presbyters met together to see about this matter" (Acts of the Apostles 15:6). They were confident that, with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, they could make the right decision. This meeting became

known as the Council of Jerusalem, the first great council of the Catholic Church. It took place in Jerusalem in about the year 49. As the arguments



Model of ancient Jerusalem at the time of Herod the Great (first century B.C.)

went back and forth, the **Apostle Peter** told the council that "God, who knows the heart," granted Gentiles "the holy Spirit just as he did us" (Acts of Apostles 15:8). Peter also reminded the council that "we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as they" (Acts of the Apostles 15:11).

Then the Apostle James spoke up to present the position that the council accepted. This position has been the law of the Church ever since. Many aspects of the law of Moses—the Ten Commandments and certain marriage laws, for example—would still be the law for all Christians. But some Torah requirements—for instance, circumcision for men—would be done away with for Gentile converts, those who did not come to Christianity through Judaism. The council leaders sent Paul, Barnabas, and two other delegates back to Antioch with a letter describing the council's decision. When the delegates arrived in Antioch, "they called the assembly together and delivered the letter. When the people read it, they were delighted" (Acts of the Apostles 15:30–31).

At the Council of Jerusalem, the Holy Spirit worked through the community of the Church, helping the leaders to decide on important matters about which Jesus had left no specific instruction. And with the Holy Spirit's guidance, the Christian faith was now on its way to becoming a faith for the whole world.

Faith Words

Gentiles
Torah

Activity Pray together a prayer to the Holy Spirit to guide the Church today in all of her decisions.

The Church is inspired by the Holy Spirit.

The good news of Jesus was conveyed by word of mouth from the first believers to those who followed. But as the first eyewitness Christians began to die, the Christian community became aware that future generations would need something more than this existing oral tradition. So, the early Christians began to write things down. Many scholars agree on the following timeline.

The Gospel of Mark was the first account of Jesus' life and teachings to be written down, sometime around the year 70. The Gospels of Matthew and Luke were written down next, between A.D. 80 and 90. Matthew and Luke based their accounts on that of Mark as well as on other early Christian sources. These three Gospels are closely related, with many similarities. The fourth Gospel, the Gospel of John, was written later, probably around A.D. 100. This Gospel describes words and deeds of Jesus that are similar to those recorded by the other three Gospel writers, but it also addresses incidents and issues that are not included in the other three Gospels.

“We are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus.”

(Acts of the Apostles 15:11)

Other books of the New Testament were also written at this time. Fourteen of these, said to be the oldest books in the New Testament, are *epistles*, or letters, to the early Christian communities that were written by, or at least attributed to, Saint Paul. Seven are letters that were written by other leaders of the early Church. There is also an account of the very earliest days of the Church—the Acts of the Apostles—and a book called the Book of Revelation, which is the last book of the Bible and calls believers in Christ to look forward with hope to eternal glory. The human authors of these sacred texts, just as the authors of existing Scripture, were inspired by God the Holy Spirit to write what would faithfully present God's saving truth. And as the early Christians lived their faith, facing issues that were unknown to earlier generations, the Holy Spirit was also working in the Church, guiding the

development of Tradition. Tradition refers to the written and spoken beliefs and practices that have been passed down to us from the time of Christ and the Apostles. Together, Tradition and Scripture make up “a single sacred deposit of the Word of God” (CCC, 97). As the Church relies on the Bible as a book of faith, the Church looks to Tradition as a living witness of faith.

For more information on Scripture, see “Bible Basics” on pages 310–311.

Activity Reread this page to find out how many books there are in the New Testament. Share with a partner a New Testament passage that has particular meaning for you.

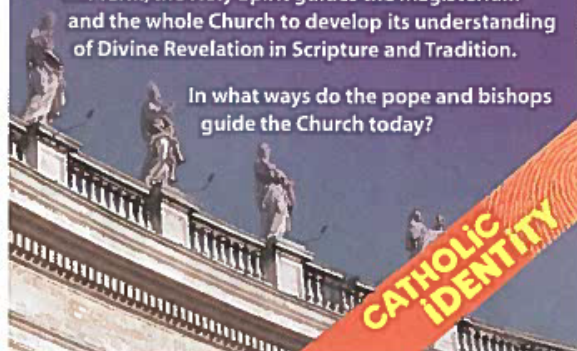
The Magisterium

The pope today can trace his authority directly back to Saint Peter, and our bishops can trace their authority directly back to the first Apostles. This is what we mean when we speak of “apostolic succession.” Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the pope and the bishops lead the Church to be faithful to God's original Revelation in Jesus and to the developments in Tradition that have taken place over the long history of the Church.

We call the teaching authority of the pope and the bishops the *Magisterium*, the living teaching office of the Church. The Magisterium's presence in the Church guarantees the continuing guidance of the Holy Spirit through apostolic succession.

Through letters, statements, and documents for the whole Church, the Magisterium continually teaches us about the truth. And when the Church encounters new circumstances, questions, and issues of importance to our faith, the Holy Spirit guides the Magisterium and the whole Church to develop its understanding of Divine Revelation in Scripture and Tradition.

In what ways do the pope and bishops guide the Church today?



RESPONDING...

Recognizing Our Faith

Recall the question at the beginning of this chapter: *What connects me to a community? What connects you to your family? your neighbors? your parish? the world?*



Living Our Faith

How will you share the good news of Jesus Christ with others?

Women of the Early Church

The lives of Lydia, Prisca, and Perpetua give us some of the greatest examples of the role of women in the early Church. **Lydia was baptized by Saint Paul. Her conversion to Christianity was very important because she was one of the first prominent Gentiles to accept Christian belief.**

Partners in FAITH

Prisca, also called Priscilla, was a Gentile married to Aquila, a Jew. They became Christians at a time when Christianity was not accepted by the Romans. Forced to leave Rome, the couple relocated to Corinth, in Greece, and became involved in Saint Paul's mission to share the good news of Jesus Christ. In his letter to the

Romans, Paul called this couple "my co-workers in Christ Jesus" (Romans 16:3).

Perpetua, an early Christian living in North Africa, and her servant Felicity were arrested and imprisoned for practicing their Christianity. Perpetua's wealthy father visited her and begged her to give up the faith. Yet she refused. Eventually, the Roman emperor ordered the deaths of Perpetua and Felicity. They became martyrs of the early Church.

Who are some women who share the good news of Jesus Christ today?



@ For additional ideas and activities, visit www.weliveourfaith.com.

Putting Faith to Work

Talk about what you have learned in this chapter:



We **understand** the history behind the spread of the early Church.



We **appreciate** the faith and courage of the early Christian believers.



We **resolve** to follow Jesus as they did, in sincerity of heart.

Decide on ways to live out what you have learned.



ENCOUNTERING GOD'S WORD



Life in the early Christian community is described in the Acts of the Apostles:

“The community of believers was of one heart and mind, and . . . had everything in common”

(Acts of the Apostles 4:32).

- ➔ **READ** the quotation from Scripture.
- ➔ **REFLECT** on the following question:
What are some ways your parish fulfills this Scripture passage?
- ➔ **SHARE** your reflections with a partner.
- ➔ **DECIDE** on ways to help other young people in your parish become part of a “community of believers.”

Choose four events discussed in this chapter and explain their significance to the Church then and now.

1. The descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost strengthened and guided the early disciples (p.78).
2. Christian missionaries who spoke Greek could preach far and wide and be understood by many, the most famous of which was St. Paul (p.79).
3. Under the emperor Nero, the Romans began persecuting Christians, which led to martyrs (p.79).
4. The Council of Jerusalem, the first great council of the Catholic Church, asserted that "we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way" as the Gentiles (p.80)

Write **True** or **False** next to the following sentences. On a separate sheet of paper, change the false sentences to make them true.

5. False Scripture and Tradition are the means...
Scripture is the only means by which God's Revelation comes to us.
6. False At the Council of Jerusalem, the Apostles made a decision that is no longer the law of the Church today. ...that is still the law of the Church today.
7. True The fourteen letters, or epistles, that are attributed to Paul are said to be the oldest books of the New Testament.
8. True As the Church relies on the Bible as a book of faith, the Church looks to Tradition as a living witness of faith.

9–10. **ESSAY:** Explain the importance of the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the community of Jesus' disciples.

"Jesus' disciples were strengthened by the Holy Spirit on Pentecost to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ to the world. The Holy Spirit was with the members of the first Christian community, guiding them to believe in Jesus and helping them to remember and live out Jesus' teachings. With the help and guidance of the Holy Spirit, the community of Jesus' disciples had become something that we can recognize today, over two thousand years later: the Catholic Church growing and working as a community to share the good news of Jesus Christ." (p.78)